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SUBJECT: GENERAL SAAVEDRA SENDS POSITIVE SIGNALS ON SECURITY
STRATEGY FOR PNC

REF: A) BOGOTA 2276

Summary

¶1. (SBU) The Embassy's Colombia Strategic Development Initiative (CSDI) working group met August 24 with Colombian Army General Carlos Saavedra, who coordinates implementation of the GOC's security strategy in relation to the National Consolidation Plan (PNC). Many areas targeted for CSDI assistance are still largely in phase one of the strategy: securing territory. Saavedra emphasized that the GOC has an integrated, inter-institutional national security plan but at the same time expressed frustration at lack of coordination among military, police, and civilian GOC agencies. Saavedra suggested a program of high-level trips to CSDI priority areas to establish the specific security conditions. The General also offered his views on security and the lack of cooperation of the local government in Tumaco, Narino. Overall, the meeting resulted in positive signals for progress. End Summary.

STILL IN PHASE ONE

¶2. (SBU) On August 24, members of the Embassy's CSDI working group met with General Carlos Ovidio SAAVEDRA Saenz, Chief of Army Operations and COLMIL PNC lead, to discuss the details of the GOC's security strategy for the PNC. Saavedra told us that they were working on a complete security map outlining the influence of both illegal armed groups and the armed forces in all consolidation areas. He added that in many locations where CSDI activities are planned, the GOC was still on the offensive, advancing and recovering territory, and as such only in "phase one" of the "clear, hold, and build strategy." He noted recent successes, however, that caused the GOC to shift several areas from red (non-permissive for consolidation) to yellow (transitional, where social and economic projects could be implemented with sufficient security for local inhabitants).

AREA COMMANDERS KEY

¶3. (SBU) Saavedra admitted that despite the PNC serving as a national security plan with an integrated and inter-institutional approach, poor implementation on the ground and a lack of unclear operational roles and procedures remained serious impediments. Saavedra noted that there was no high-level forum within the GOC to discuss consolidation security strategy in Bogota and recognized that the Embassy was meeting separately with the Center for

Coordinated Integrated Action (CCAI), the Colombian National Police (CNP), and the Colombian military. He suggested that meetings need be raised to "the level of decisions" rather than simple information exchanges. For General Saavedra, area commanders are essential in order to evaluate current conditions, and offered to lead visits to CSDI priority zones to meet with those area commanders to get their security assessments (Note: Post will collaborate with Saavedra on participating in these visits to heighten awareness of how CSDI can assist.)

URBAN TUMACO NOT THE REAL PROBLEM IN NARINO

14. (SBU) On security plans for Tumaco, General Saavedra told us that the rural areas in the municipality of Tumaco and the rest of western Narino, particularly along the Ecuadorean border, are the real problems and not the city of Tumaco. In many rural areas, he asserted, the absence of state-provided services and state presence has led to an environment ripe for illegal armed groups. He added that the uncertainty of the upcoming election year is creating a delicate situation in the region and that the appropriate balance of public forces to address the security problems along the Pacific region is 60 percent army and 40 percent police. General Saavedra also emphasized the need to encourage healthy participation by locally elected officials, whose agendas often differ from that of the national government.

BACRIM A POLICE PROBLEM

15. (SBU) When asked how the PNC envisions transferring security responsibilities from the military to the police in stabilized areas, Saavedra was vague but told us that relations between the CNP and the Colombian military have never been better and that they are

beginning to talk more. He added that the fight against BACRIM (organized criminal bands) is a police problem because the issue is not territorial control but rather rule of law. However, getting sufficient numbers of capable prosecutors into these zones is "not easy," he lamented. Saavedra said they are hoping for increased financing for the Prosecutor General's office (Fiscalia) to create the needed legal structures, including sixteen new prosecutors to be assigned to consolidation areas.

BROWNFIELD